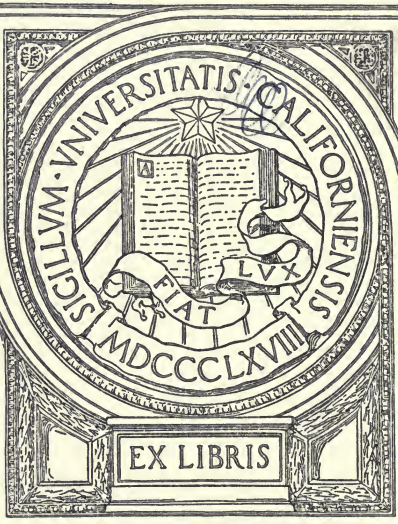


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NIGHTS AT THE OPERA

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WAGNER'S DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN

By Wakeling Dry

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THE PROLOGUE. DAS RHEINGOLD.

I. GROWTH AND FULFILMENT.

IT was in the eventful year 1848 that Wagner finished the instrumentation of Lohengrin. The political troubles between Germany and Saxony were affecting things in general ; and Wagner, it will be remembered, was drawn into the vortex. But to his active mind, such things were mere side issues ; and he was searching for a new subject on which to work out his scheme for the Lyric Drama. That something vast in idea and scope was alone likely to be chosen, appears from the themes which he took up, examined and discarded. From the contempla-

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tion of "Jesus of Nazareth"—which theme was subsequently developed, in a great measure, in Parsifal—he turned to "Barbarossa": and finally decided that only a mythical subject would be suitable for the special musical treatment he had in mind. After writing an essay on the history of the world in the Saga, and an article on the Nibelung myth, he composed a version of a drama founded on the death of Siegfried. But the plan of dealing with Siegfried in a single opera was soon found to be impracticable; and from a letter to Liszt in 1851, we learn that Wagner had then already decided to expand the work into a trilogy with a prologue.

The story of Siegfried, the earliest of Teutonic heroes—thus developed by Wagner into his largest, if not his

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greatest, lyric drama, and considered by him to be the great achievement of his life—was completed, so far as the poem was concerned, by the end of 1852.

The music of *The Ring*, owing to many interruptions, occupied Wagner for more than twenty-five years ; and its performance at Bayreuth in 1876 came as the crowning glory of his life. By 1854, the music to the prologue (*Das Rheingold*) and the first part (*Die Walküre*) had been completed ; then the despair of ever appealing to the opera-goer with such a colossal and revolutionary work made Wagner take up with *Tristan und Isolde*. Before the completion of the latter, however, he had returned to his great work ; and the music of the second part (*Siegfried*) occupied him up to 1869.

In the meantime, the strong national

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feeling which had made the larger work so dear to Wagner had prompted an excursion into another region of the lyric art, that of real comic opera. *Die Meistersinger* was completed, and produced at Munich in 1868. But the friendly help of King Ludwig of Bavaria which came to him at about this time, did not obtain for Wagner any long spell of peace or prosperity. It was in the loneliness of a second exile in Switzerland, that he set himself to the task of completing *The Ring*, wondering, no doubt, when he would ever be able to produce it. The first idea—since carried out by the building of the Prinz Regenten Theatre — was to make Munich the place where the Festival Playhouse should be erected ; but Bayreuth was subsequently settled upon ; and in 1872 Wagner went thither to live.

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A performance of *Das Rheingold*, against the wish of Wagner, was given at Munich in September 1869; but the real creators of *The Ring* were those who took part at the first authorized performance at Bayreuth on August 13th, 1876.

The conductor was Dr. Hans Richter, the stage manager Karl Brandt of Darmstadt, who had been Wagner's chief assistant in the general planning of the building, and who had chosen Brückwald of Leipzig as the architect. Joseph Hoffman, a professor at Vienna, designed the scenery and the two Brückners of Coburg executed it. Anton Seidl, Franz Fischer and Felix Mottl were among those who coached the performers and assisted as conductors behind the scenes. On the following night *Die Walküre* was given—this latter

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had been seen actually for the first time at Munich in August 1870; but, as before noted, its production at the time was against Wagner's wishes.

The Ring in its entirety was afterwards produced at Munich in 1878, at Vienna and Leipsic in 1879, at Hamburg in 1880, and at Berlin in 1881. London saw it in the May of 1882, Anton Seidl conducting.

It was given at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York on March 4th and 5th, the cycle being completed by performances on March 8th and 11th.

At the initial performance at Bayreuth, Liszt, Saint-Saens and Grieg were among the audience, which also comprised the Emperor of Germany, the Emperor of Brazil, and the King of Bavaria. There was a deficit of over

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£7,000 on the first representation and Wagner had to forego the exclusive rights which he had intended for Bayreuth. A performance at Munich being arranged for, on payment of the sum required to make up the balance, Neumann organized a touring company composed of the chief of the Bayreuth singers, and with Seidl as conductor, and much to Wagner's dislike, separate performances of the parts were given. But there can be no question that these performances helped to popularize the work.

II. THE SOURCE OF THE STORY

In the *Nibelungenlied*, the national epic of Germany—a work holding a place in literature akin to that of the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*, and the *Æneid*—Wagner found the story of Siegfried, the dragon-slayer, invulnerable like Achilles, save in a single spot. Apart from its being a noble presentment of the German conception of loyalty and valour, the tale is concerned with this hero's murder, after he has taken the hoard of treasure from the Nibelungs, and has married Kriemhild, a princess of Burgundy. Here we get an important characteristic of these old stories, viz. that, in process of time, the personages in them become identified with actual

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historical people. The tale goes on to tell of the vengeance taken by Siegfried's wife for his murder, and of the aid she receives from Attila and Dietrich.

In setting forth the ethical side of his drama—the destruction of the gods through their own wrong-doing, and indirectly by their succumbing to the love of gold, Wagner found the mythological element in that collection of the tales of the Northmen, which were put into shape by Icelandic writers about the eleventh century, and called the *Eddas*. Of these collections there were two, the *Prose Edda*, which was a handbook of model phrases and synonyms for the poets of the period, and an *Elder Edda*. But there was yet a third cycle of stories utilized by Wagner, the Saga of Thedrek, or Dietrich (of Berne), who himself appears as a character in the less

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rudimentary and more mediævalized *Nibelungenlied*, and who was, in fact, an actual historical personage, Theodorica of Verona, a Goth who had taken up his abode in Italy.

Deeply interesting and most instructive as the study of the sources of this drama is, we cannot at the moment do more than bring a few of its more important general aspects to the reader's notice, leaving certain details, such as variations in incident or intention, and the recognition of original ideas, until we are considering the actual scenes as they occur with the music.

First then we must understand that the stories in their rudimentary shape belong to the Aryan race, the common stock of the western people; and although the manner of telling these stories is Scandinavian, their first home

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was that of the German people—the Rhineland. The story of a noble race which dies out in process of time, and the accomplishment of some great act or purpose by one of its scions—necessitating intermarriage of a kind repellent to modern ideas—is of the greatest antiquity and constantly recurs in the old tales. Again, it is important to understand that the gods of northern mythology were not supposed to be immortal, and that the same individuals often appear in varying shapes and often under varying names—a characteristic which adds to the difficulty of acquiring even a general acquaintance with them. Finally, in writing his drama, Wagner reverts to the old Greek form, immortalized by Æschylus, in representing Fate as a domineering element, to which even gods must bow, making use of the

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modern acceptation of the idea, namely that sin brings inevitable punishment, which may be swift or slow according to circumstances, but which is always sure. This will help to make clear the reason why Wagner found the Siegfried story, in itself, insufficient for his purpose, and why he had to revert to, and draw upon, the old Norse legends in order to complete his drama.¹

¹ For further study of this fascinating subject, the following books should be read :—Ludlow's *Popular Epics of the Middle Ages* ; Jessie M. Weston's *Legends of the Wagner Drama* ; the short but most valuable and scholarly primer by Dr. Jiriczek, *Deutsche Heldensage* (in German), published by Göschen of Stuttgart ; and, of course, the beautiful version of the *Volsunga Saga* by Wm. Morris and Magnusson.

III. CHARACTERS IN THE ORDER OF THEIR FIRST APPEARANCE.

WOGLINDE (<i>soprano</i>)	} The Rhine Maidens.
WELLGUNDE (<i>mezzo</i>)	
FLOSSHILDE (<i>contralto</i>)	
ALBERICH (<i>baritone</i>), chief of the Nibelungs.	

FRICKA (*mezzo*), Wotan's wife, Goddess of Marriage, and sister to Freia, Donner and Froh.

WOTAN (*bass*), supreme among the gods, father of the Valkyries and also of Siegmund and Sieglinde.

FREYA (*soprano*), Goddess of Plenty.

FASOLT and FAFNER (*basses*),
Giants.

FROH (*tenor*), God of Joy.

DONNER (*baritone*), God of
Thunder.

LOGE (*tenor*), God of Fire, and also
of Falsehood.

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MIME (*tenor*), one of the Nibelungs.

ERDA (*contralto*), Goddess of the Earth and of Wisdom.

SIEGMUND and SIEGLINDE (*tenor and soprano*), twin children of Wotan, passing under the name of Walse.

HUNDING (*bass*), a mortal, to whom Sieglinde is first wedded.

BRUNNHILDE (*soprano*), eldest of Valkyries, daughter of Wotan.

HELMWIGE (*soprano*)

GERHILDE „

WALTRAUTE (*mezzo*)

ORTLINDE „

SIEGRUNE „

ROSSWEISE „

GRIMGERDE (*contralto*)

SCHWERTLEITE „

The
Valkyries,
sisters to
Brunhilde.

SIEGFRIED (*tenor*), son of Sieglinde and Siegmund.

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The Voice of the Bird (*soprano*).

The Three Norns (*soprano, mezzo and contralto*), Daughters of the Earth, and Spinners of the Thread of Destiny.

GUNTHER (*bass*), son of Gibich and Grimhilde.

HAGEN (*bass*), his half-brother, son of Grimhilde by Alberich.

GUTRUNE (*soprano*), his sister.

IV. STORY AND MUSIC SIDE BY SIDE.

DAS RHEINGOLD.

THE opening scene is meant to show us the depths of the river and its caverns, the abode of the water nixies. Important as is the poem of the prologue for a proper understanding of all that follows, it is wonderful to note how the music itself claims our first attention. In his simple yet daring prelude, made up as it is of a single chord, Wagner interprets musically the old mythological idea that life, with all its capabilities, sprang from water. Cool, quivering with motion, and felt, though invisible, to be translucently deep, the picture of the river depths is brought vividly before our eyes before the

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curtain rises. And it requires no analysis to understand how this striking effect is achieved by Wagner's master hand. The fundamental note, the fifth, the octave, the gradual filling up of the chord, the pulsation—as new rhythms are added with the passing notes—all proceed with straightforward simplicity and yet with marvellous fullness and subtlety.

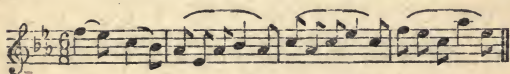
Used in a slight but eminently suggestive way in Siegfried, it assumes great importance in the final part (*Die Götterdämmerung*) when reference is made to the restoration of the treasure ; and throughout the other parts there are many apparent motives derived from it, three of the most characteristic being the *Sword* (in Siegfried), the *Ride of the Valkyries*, and *Brünnhilde's sleep*.

Guarding the golden treasure the

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three Rhine-maidens are swimming to and fro in the limpid depths of the river. The origin of this treasure, which in the old legends plays so important a part in the subsequent development of the drama, is shrouded in mystery. In the Volsunga-saga it is the property of the dwarf Andvari, and Loge is the first who obtains possession of it. In the Nibelungenlied Siegfried wins it from his brothers Schilbung and Nibelung. In the Thidrek-saga its final restoration to the *earth* is indicated and not (as in the others), to the Rhine.

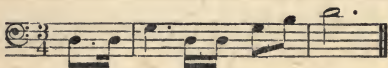
THE RHINE MAIDENS.



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melody is smirched, as it were, on the entrance of Alberich, ugliest of the Nibelungs, a race of elfs or gnomes dwelling in the dark region of Nibelheim, the lowest of the nine worlds in northern mythology and the abode of departed spirits. The maidens mock him with deceitful promises, to punish him for his lustful purpose ; but they go too far. One of them chatters of the prize they guard. The *Gold* motive is given out by the trumpets as the treasure gleams forth ; and in a beautiful passage for the three voices, the maidens greet it with a joyful cry.

THE GOLD.

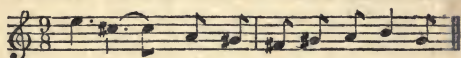


Alberich's rage at the failure of his fell designs changes to cunning and

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to covetousness when he learns that the gold, if forged into a ring will bestow unlimited power upon its lucky possessor and give him sway over the whole universe.

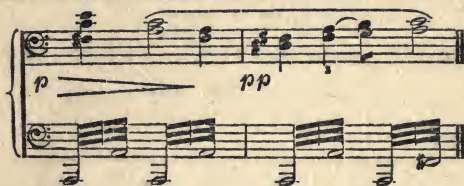
THE MAGIC POWER OF THE RING.



Nor is he deterred from his new resolve to possess the treasure by the knowledge that love must first be renounced before he can become greater than the gods themselves. This idea is an original one of Wagner's. Before the maidens have any idea of his purpose Alberich has reached the summit of the rock, and snatching the gold he disappears with a hideous laugh of victory. Then the orchestra gives out the *Ring* motive.

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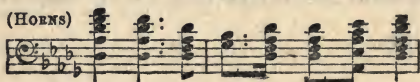
THE RING.



As Woglinde and her companions realise their loss and their utter foolishness, darkness pervades the scene and they make a futile attempt to catch the gnome. But gradually the light reappears, and we see a stretch of rocky country with a castle in the distance.

It is Walhalla, the palace of the gods, and Wagner, with his own special and consummate art, evolves a characteristic motive from the preceding one.

WALHALLA.



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This phrase will be subsequently recognized as associated with Siegfried. Wotan and his wife Fricka are gazing at the structure which the giants Fafner and Fasolt have just completed for them. But the price to be paid is high—no less than the delivering to the giants of Freya, the goddess of youth and beauty, and the cultivator of the golden apples which give to the gods eternal youth. Here Wagner has worked in from another myth this incident of the ransom, taking it from the story of Loke's capture by the giant Thiasse.

The reckoning has to be made, and Fricka, whose intention it was, by the erection of this superb dwelling, to keep her wayward husband under close control, is inclined to forget in her anxiety that she, too, was a party to the bargain.

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Freya now appears appealing to the gods for rescue; and she is closely followed by the giants in pursuit. The ponderous motive here introduced is wonderfully expressive of immense force.

THE GIANTS.



Wotan, who at first refuses to fulfil his bond, is warned by the giants of the dire consequences which will result if good faith is not kept with them. Wotan, however, temporizes pending the return of Loge, the cunning and malicious fire-spirit. Enemy of the gods as he was, Wotan nevertheless confides in

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him in the hope that his artfulness will suggest some way out of the difficulty by finding a substitute to offer the giants in place of Freya. Loge now arrives on the scene, but he has found nothing that he can suggest as an alternative. He tells, however, of the theft of the gold by Alberich and how possession of the treasure has been obtained by the renunciation of love. At this recital the giants' curiosity is aroused, but Wotan has decided that he himself must possess this ring lest Alberich should attain to supreme power. The giants, however, are masters of the situation and they offer to take this stolen Rhine-gold as a ransom for Freya, holding her, meanwhile, as a hostage.

In the music the quivering phrase apporportioned to Loge will be noticed, and one closely related to it, the *flames*

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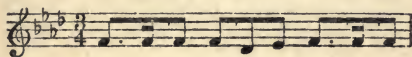
announced by Wotan. These will appear as guarding the sleep of Brünnhilde in the next part of *The Ring*. In delightful contrast is the melody of the golden apples. No sooner has Freya been taken away than the gods begin to feel the passage of time. Wotan then resolves to gain the Ring, not with the object of restoring it to the Rhine, but with that of regaining Freya. Wagner here again brings originality into his scheme. He connects the entry of Sin, which leads to the downfall of the gods, with this treasure of the Rhine-gold, and thus makes a strong dramatic point.

In the interlude which accompanies the change in the scene, the *Loge* motive is principally used, and the various quotations from previous material gradually merge into the *Forge*, which is

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reinforced by the sound of the anvils of the workers in the subterranean region of Nibelheim to which we now descend.

THE FORGE.



By virtue of the Ring's power, Alberich has subdued all the dark gnomes, and rules them with a rod of iron. One of them, Mime, has made for him a magic cap, the Tarnhelm, which has the power of making the wearer of it invisible. The cunning dwarf wants to keep this talisman for himself, but Alberich punishes him for his presumption. Wailings of impotence are heard, in the midst of which Wotan and Loge appear and see a long procession of the Nibelungs carrying back the treasure they have delved, and at the same time

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observe an example of Alberich's despotic power. Boasting of his own might and plans for revenge, Alberich exults over his visitors, and Wotan, in disgust and rage, raises his spear to slay the gnome. Loge's diplomacy, however, comes to the rescue, and he flatters Alberich, at the same time hinting that they cannot quite believe in his wonderful powers. In the music expressing Alberich's exultation, a clever use is made of the first bar of the *Walbatta* motive, combined with that of *Loge*. It indicates that the gnome already believes that his power, obtained by cunning and established by fire, is universally supreme.

Loge cunningly invites Alberich to show off his powers. This the gnome does, changing himself first into a dragon and then into a repulsive toad. In this shape his capture is easy, and the gods

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snatch him up and carry him to the surface of the earth.

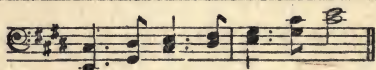
Alberich, captured like a rat in a trap, has first to yield his hoard of gold, next the magic cap, and finally the Ring itself. But Wotan has to tear this latter from Alberich's finger, and then the gnome, with horrible imprecations, calls down a curse. The Ring shall bring not power but destruction, not joy but misery ; and the gnomes will devote their ceaseless energies to the destruction of the power of the gods.

Fafner and Fasolt now bring in Freya and claim in exchange the promised treasure. Fasolt places her between their two spears, which are set upright like pillars, and directs that the treasure shall be heaped up around her until her form is hidden. But for this the gold by itself will not suffice ; first the magic

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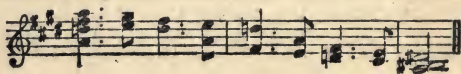
cap is added, and then the Ring itself, in order to cover up the remaining aperture. Wotan, however, holds on to this last treasure, just as Alberich had struggled to do. The giants are about to carry Freya away when Erda, the spirit of the earth and the mother of the Norns (the Fates of northern mythology) appears, and counsels Wotan to give up the accursed Ring. The characteristic phrase of the Norns is a minor

THE NORNS.



form of the opening Rhine motive. Inverted, it will be recognized when the Fall of the Gods is foretold by Erda.

THE FALL OF THE GODS.



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This short but most important introduction of the prophecy of the end of the gods is taken from the Elder Edda. Knowing Erda's power of seeing into futurity, the gods, after consultation, agree to give up the Ring ; and its power, changed to evil, soon manifests itself. From wrangling, the giants come to blows, and Fasolt is slain.

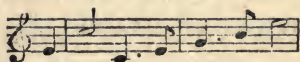
In the Volsunga-saga, it is Fafner's father who is slain, and the brother, Regin, becomes the person represented by Mime in Siegfried. Fafner goes off to hide in the forest, and by the aid of the Tarnhelm changes himself into a dragon, the better to guard his treasure, of which he is too stupid to make any use.

While the gods have been watching Fafner in the act of collecting his treasure, the sky has become overcast with clouds, and Donner disperses them by

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a storm. In contrast to the fierce tone colour of the brass which accompanies the incantation, comes the radiant melody of the rainbow, as its coloured arch is thrown across the sky for the entry of the gods into Walhalla. Wotan has been deep in thought as to how he can preserve the supremacy of the gods now that the Ring has been lost to them. He will raise up a race of heroes one of whom, helped by his divine origin, but of his own free will, shall atone for the theft of the treasure by restoring it to its place in the Rhine. He picks up a sword left by Fafner and the Sword motive is heard.

THE SWORD.



The picking up of the sword is an appeal to the eye merely, and though

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legitimate, is added as an afterthought. Wagner's intention was to make the music carry its special import.

To the repetition and fuller treatment of the *Rainbow* phrase, the gods pass into their palace along the path of light, whilst from the distance comes the moaning cry of the Rhine-maidens. The prologue sets forth the impending doom and the inevitable end, and enables us to understand the curse which pursues every one who, however innocently, comes into possession of the treasure as symbolized by the Ring.

DIE WALKÜRE.

In the first part of the Trilogy we see the working out of Wotan's scheme for expiation through the human element which he has called into existence. First, there are the Valkyries, warrior-maidens, the embodiment of strength—

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chief of whom is Brünnhilde, Wotan's daughter by Erda—who bring to Walhalla the heroes chosen by Wotan after they have perished in battle. Secondly, there are the twins, Siegmund and Sieglinde, predestined for each other, but whose very existence, called into being at the will of Wotan for a set purpose, removes them from the plane of their fellow-mortals. Their union, necessary for the working out of the purpose of the drama, must be regarded as a close affinity of kindred souls ; and the main idea of the tragedy of the parents of Siegfried which we are now to consider is that of the supremacy, first, of the moral law, and secondly (in the punishment of Brünnhilde), of the duty of obedience to the divine command. Wagner changes the name of Signy, as found in the Volunga-saga, to Sieglinde, which is the

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name given to Siegfried's mother in the *Nibelungenlied*.

The prologue is a wonderful piece of descriptive writing. In the vast forest, within which we are to see the hut of Hunding, a wild storm is raging. As the scene is revealed to our view the storm abates. In the centre of the hut rises a huge tree which rears its head high above the roof. It is a counterpart of the mighty Ash-tree which overshadows the roof of Walhalla.

The door opens and a fugitive, roughly clad in skins and buffeted by the storm, enters to seek shelter from the elements. After glancing around in fear he sinks, overcome with weariness, before the hearth. The descending notes heard in the prelude among the bases gradually resolve into the motive of the *Tired Siegfried*. To quote only

Wagner's *Der Ring*

one of many similar evolutions which Wagner brings about with such mastery, the hearer may be reminded of the growth of the *Volballa* motive from its predecessor *The Ring* in the prologue.

Sieglinde now enters and is surprised at the advent of a stranger. She awakens him and after ministering to his comfort by giving him a draught of mead, and by making a rapid examination of his wounds, learns, by questioning him, that he has been chased by his enemies and that his weapons have proved useless. After accepting the drink at her hands, the fugitive wishes to go on his way, since he only brings trouble on those who

THE WALSUNG RACE.



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would keep him. Sieglinde answers with sadness that he cannot possibly bring into her life more misfortune than is already there, and presses him to await the return of Hunding, her husband.

As the two are still gazing at each other, Hunding appears, and glancing at the intruder, looks, with questioning eyes, upon his wife. A harsh yet vigorous theme is here given out by the horns, in sharp contrast to the suave melody which is heard when the two Volsungs are both being drawn to each other. As he bids Sieglinde prepare the meal, to which he invites Siegmund, Hunding is struck by the likeness the latter bears to his wife. When they are seated, Siegmund tells them the story of his birth and sufferings, how he and his twin sister are the children of Walse

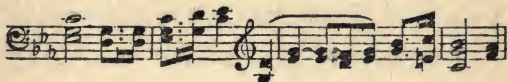
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(the wolf)¹ and how their home was one day burned to the ground by enemies, their mother being killed and the daughter carried off. He goes on to tell how he and his father lived in the woods, constantly hunted and pursued, and how at length he became separated from his father and never saw him again. Then among his adventures he recalls one in which he was called upon to protect a maiden who was being forced into an unwilling marriage, but being overpowered, after a valiant resistance, he saw the maiden die and managed to escape, weaponless.

As Sieglinde is deeply touched by the narrative, a development of the motive of the Volsung race, emphasizing their heroic attributes, swells into prominence.

¹ Obviously the fabulous Were-wolf stories are here hinted at by Wagner.

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Hunding, at the beginning of the recital, has recognized in Siegmund an enemy whom he has been called upon to fight by his own people. He decides to give him shelter for the night and to engage him in combat on the morrow.¹

By the repetition of the *Love* motive, as Hunding retires to the inner room, the growing affection of Sieglinde for the visitor is made apparent: and as she glances at the tree we hear a part of the *Sword* motive.

Siegmund, musing by the fire, thinks of the sword his father promised he would find in his direst need and peril. By the fire, in his dream, the hilt of a sword is seen in the tree, but as yet

¹ Even the rough Hunding has sufficient acquaintance with chivalry to acknowledge the "guest-right."

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Siegmund does not catch sight of it. He is absorbed in thoughts of Sieglinde.

After securing Hunding's sure sleep by means of a drugged drink, Sieglinde comes back, ostensibly to warn Siegfried of danger, and to bid him fly in the darkness of the night. She then tells him the circumstances of her enforced union with Hunding, and how a stranger entered the hall while the men sat over their cups—a weird figure clad in a cloak and with one of his eyes covered by a slouch hat. The *Walballe* motive here gives us the clue—that this was Wotan.¹

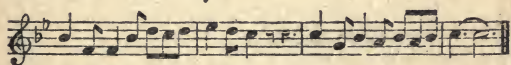
Sieglinde further relates that this strange person plunged the sword he

¹ The explanation of the one eye of the stranger is undoubtedly to be found in the connection between Wotan and Odin, the Sun God.

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was carrying into the ash, stating at the same time that only he who was worthy to wield the weapon would be able to withdraw it. In her heart Sieglinde hopes that Siegmund may be the one to perform this act.

Siegmund, now worked up into a frenzy of love, passionately clasps her to his breast and declares his love. As he does so the door of the hut flies open, and the moon floods the interior with light. To the entrancing beauty of the *Spring song* the orchestra throbs in fullness and delicacy.



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sure he can gain the tree-embedded sword, names him Siegmund. As he withdraws it, we hear the warning note of renunciation ; but Siegmund joyfully dubs the weapon Nothung, as he raises it on high and clasps Sieglinde. As the love motive swells out in the orchestra, Sieglinde reveals the fact that she is sister as well as bride ; and when the *Sword* motive has been trumpeted forth, the impending tragedy is foretold by the phrase of the *Nibelungs*, which is heard as the curtain descends.

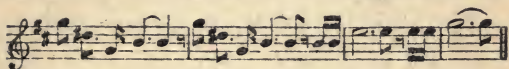
THE SECOND ACT.

In the prelude to the second act, the music carries on the action by depicting the flight of the pair from Hunding's dwelling. Towards the end we hear the cry of the Valkyries,

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sounding the note of that which is to follow.

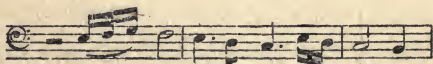
THE VALKYRIES.



In the midst of wild and rocky scenery, Wotan and his daughter Brünnhilde appear. The god orders her to gain the victory for Siegmund in his combat with Hunding, and as she mounts the rock to call her warrior-sisters, she warns her father of the approach of Fricka, who comes in indignation to demand punishment for the violaters of the sanctity of marriage.

In vain Wotan tries to explain away the offence by showing the motive which led to the creation of a race of heroes, one of whom, by his own free will, shall rid them of the curse. A

deep phrase is heard muttering on the
bass of the wood-wind, indicative of
Wotan's anger. He sees that he must



Brünnhilde, equipped for the fight, and leading her war-steed, Grane, enters ; but stays her progress on seeing Wotan in such a gloomy and abstracted mood. To her he reveals his thoughts and broodings. Into her sympathetic ear he pours the tale of his distress, of his desire for supreme power and the story of the Gold and the Ring ; and how the curse from which he has worked to escape has rested on him and his race.

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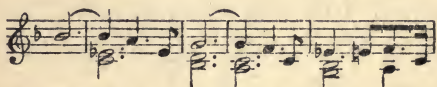
In this long and magnificent scene, although the music is dominated by the motive of Wotan's anger, the wonderful and complete use of preceding motives will be recognized ; and there is besides that master stroke to admire in the change of the *Walhalla* motive, announcing the coming fall of the Gods, which comes in towards the close.

Brünnhilde realizes that Wotan is fighting against himself in that he wishes to destroy his beloved Siegmund, to whom she feels her heart go out in sympathy. Wotan has for the first time to express anger before Brünnhilde can be brought to fulfil his command. In enlisting Brünnhilde on the side of the parents of Siegfried, Wagner gives us a proof of his genius as a dramatist pure and simple. No hint of such a

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connection save with Siegfried himself is to be found in the old stories.

Sieglinde now enters to the hurried and impetuous motive of *Flight* a develop-



ment of the phrase used in connection with Freya in the prologue when she was pursued by the giants. Siegmund is not far behind her, spurred on by the sound of the horn and the hounds, which are heard in the distance. In her distress Sieglinde becomes unconscious and sinks to the ground. Brünnhilde comes out of her hiding-place and reveals to Siegmund that he must prepare for death, and follow her to the abode prepared for the valiant ones. Very touching is his renunciation of the joys she offers him. If

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Sieglinde, his beloved, cannot accompany him to Walhalla, then let common death and oblivion claim him. And rather than allow Sieglinde to fall into the hands of the conquerors, he will kill her as she lies. Then Brünnhilde's sympathy gets the better of her judgment. She tells him of the life within Sieglinde which must be preserved, and assures him of her protection. Notice with what genius Wagner turns the *Death* motive into the major, and puts it into the form of the *Flight* motive, thus transferring it to Hunding. Gently removing Sieglinde to a sheltered nook, Siegmund, in joyful confidence, hastens off to meet the foe. The storm clouds which have been darkening the scene now burst and the lightning-flashes reveal the combatants, with Brünnhilde protecting Siegmund. Just as the latter

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is aiming the death-blow at Hunding, Wotan becomes visible, and interposes his spear; Siegmund's weapon flies to pieces, and the victory is Hunding's. As darkness again intervenes, Brünnhilde seizes the inanimate Sieglinde and carries her off, and a momentary flash shows us Hunding removing his sword from the body of his foe. But Hunding's triumph is short lived. In terrible wrath Wotan slays him with a look; and in furious rage at Brünnhilde's disobedience starts in pursuit of her.

THE THIRD ACT.

The prelude to the Third Act is the now familiar Ride of the Valkyries, which it might well be wished were less well-known. Its effect, startling enough

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by its vivid movement, would be greater if it were never heard save in its proper place in the work.

Four of the warrior maidens are seen, as the curtain rises, uttering their exultant war-cry ; and one by one the others fly through the clouds, each bearing a hero on the saddle. Brünnhilde is the last, and she bears a living woman, Sieglinde. The storm is increasing in violence and one feels instinctively that Wotan is behind it, and that the storm of his anger is soon to be let loose. The suspense becomes intensified as we hear the refusal of the warrior-maidens to aid Brünnhilde and her *protégée*. Sieglinde, after reproaching her protector for the loss of her husband, is at last comforted by the thought of the free hero she is soon to give birth to, and she is persuaded to take

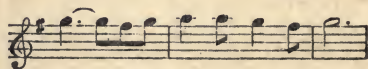
Wagner's *Der Ring*

refuge in the forest where Fafner dwells. Brünnhilde gives her the fragments of the Sword broken in the contest, and directs that the name of Siegfried shall be given to the child.

Nearly the whole of the music of this opening scene is a development of the *Ride* motive, until a splendid theme announces the Siegfried that is to be born as the guardian of the Sword, a glimpse of which has been seen in the



second act. Then Sieglinde sings the *Redemption by Love*, of which considerable use is made in the last part of the

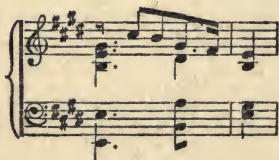


trilogy, of which it forms the climax.

The wonderfully impressive scene

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which follows demands undivided attention. It will be seen that the music grows mainly out of Wotan's anger. The sorrow of Wotan, the submission of poor Brünnhilde, need little explanation. The imposition of a new life, of a human existence, on the warrior-maiden ; her pathetic appeal to her father to protect her from any save a man of supreme strength and valour ; the taking away of her divinity by a kiss form a scene, the dramatic intensity of which is painful, and makes a mention of musical material and treatment seem altogether unnecessary. The mysterious harmony of the charmed sleep, and the striking theme which is



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associated with Brünnhilde are made to culminate with consummate skill in the *Flame* theme, as Loge causes the ring of fire to spring up at Wotan's request and the latter accedes to the last wish of his courageous child. After Wotan's supremely touching farewell, all the motives seem to dissolve into the peaceful sleep of Brünnhilde. As a last touch of genius, when Wotan takes a final look at his beloved daughter whom he has thus been compelled to punish—the punishment, of course, being symbolical of death—Wagner quotes the dread *Fate* motive.

Thus again, at the end of each
part of this mighty drama,
we are left face to face,
as it were, with the
inevitable.

SIEGFRIED.

THE FIRST ACT.

TRULY delightful in its spontaneous freshness, the second part of the Trilogy comes as a welcome relief from the intensity of the preceding section. Its predominating note is reminiscent of Nature in her loveliness, its purport the teaching she imparts to an open mind ; and in listening to the free descriptive music we may well reserve for secondary consideration the fascinating task of examining its structure for motives. The story of Siegfried, the typical Teutonic hero, leading up to the awakening of Brünnhilde as its central point, is a brief respite—a day of

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joy, and we need not think of the gloom of the morrow. It is of interest to note in passing that Wagner, who has hitherto mainly followed the Volsunga-saga, now turns to the less-known Thidrek-saga, of which mention has already been made.

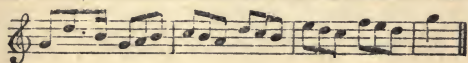
The prelude is made up of familiar material, the *Amassing of the Treasure, the Ring, the Sword*, and the *Nibelung's Triumph*, with the *Forge* gradually asserting itself. The intention is to bring us into the workshop of the dwarf (who is guarding the hero whom Sieglinde has borne), and to indicate the secret hopes of ultimately gaining the Treasure for himself that are filling Mime's mind. For it is on the hopeless task of attempting to re-unite the fragments of Siegmund's sword that Mime (who takes the place of Regin in the old story)

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is engaged. With muttered imprecations evoked by his own impotence—since with such a weapon the boy could easily attain the coveted Ring—Mime continues his task, well knowing that every blade he fashions will be broken by Siegfried.

Leading a bear which he has captured, Siegfried comes bounding in. After

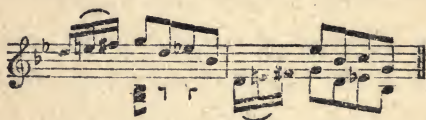
SIEGFRIED'S CALL.



frightening the dwarf, he sets the animal free and demands the Sword that has taken so long in the making. His animation and buoyant spirits are shown by the next motive, *The joy of life*. With a blow, he snaps the blade which Mime gives him, and will not listen to the dwarf's explanations. Then Mime

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THE JOY OF LIFE.



tells a whining tale of careful upbringing, of his sitting at home himself whilst the boy was roaming the forest. Siegfried, in disgust, cuts the story short by asking who his parents were. To a soft melody given by the 'cellos (which expresses his own love of nature), Siegfried tells how even the animals in the forest have their parents, and that he himself has seen the love the latter bear to their offspring. In confusion, Mime tells the boy that he himself is both father and mother to him. But Siegfried has not learnt Nature's lesson in vain. He tells the dwarf that even young animals bear some likeness

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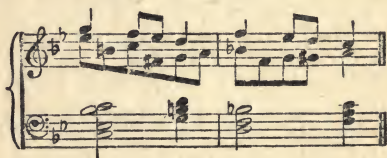
to their parents ; and that since he has seen his own features mirrored in the water, he knows full well that Mime is lying. But it requires some force on Siegfried's part before the dwarf can be made to disclose the knowledge the boy seeks ; and then to a repetition of the Volsung motives, Mime tells of Sieglinde's sufferings, how he found her in the forest, gave her the shelter of his hut, and how in giving birth to a child she died, first directing that the babe should be named Siegfried. Of the father Mime could give no particulars. All that he knew was that he was slain in a fight, and that the fragments of his Sword has been carefully preserved.

In proof of his veracity, Mime now produces the pieces and shows them to Siegfried. The boy is overjoyed to find that Mime is not his father, and that the

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dingy forge is not his home. To a joyous theme of freedom, he goes out again into the forest, first ordering Mime to complete his task of reuniting the fragments of the Sword before his return.

WANDERING SIEGFRIED.



Wotan, disguised as the Wanderer (Odin, a familiar figure in northern mythology), now arrives on the scene to find Mime in despair at his inability to accomplish the task. In spite of the dwarf's churlish reception, the god seats himself by the forge and makes a wager, with his head as forfeit, that he will

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answer any three questions the dwarf may put to him. In this 'contest by riddles' Wagner is making use of an episode frequently to be found in mediæval poetry (as in the poem of the Wartburg Krieg), and the music of the scene is of marvellous beauty, each reply being annotated by the motives which are associated with the subject touched upon. Mime, thinking to get rid of his prying visitor, takes up the challenge, and puts the first question "By whom are the depths of the earth peopled?" To this the answer comes "By the Nibelungs, and Alberich was once their master." The answer to second question—as to the race inhabiting the surface of the earth—is "The giants," the information being added that the dragon Fafner now guards the treasure that was once

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theirs. The answer to Mime's last question—as to the dwellers in the heavens—is expressed, musically, by the *Walballa* motive and is emphasised by a thunderclap.

It is now Mime's turn to be questioned. To the first two questions he readily answers—that the Volsung race is the most favoured by Wotan, and that Nothung is the Sword by which the dragon can be vanquished ; but the third places the dwarf in the Wanderer's power, since he cannot tell who shall forge the Sword. With the intimation that the Mime's head will be claimed as forfeit by one who, never having experienced fear, will forge the Sword and with it destroy Fafner, the god takes his departure.

Here a bright flame flickers over the scene (in which, by the music, we recognise the mocking of Loge). Mime sinks

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appalled ; and the words of the Wanderer, in whom he has recognised Wotan, come into his mind as Siegfried enters and demands the Sword. In order that the boy shall not be able to complete the task, Mime resolves to teach him fear. Weirdly expressive is the way in which the themes of the *Fire* motive and the *Slumber of Brünnhilde* are introduced and interwoven as Mime tells the boy of Fafner.

Siegfried, in his anxiety to meet the monster, and to experience this new sensation of fear, decides to forge the Sword himself. The ending of the scene carries the listener away by the sheer strength of its life and descriptive force. Beginning with the joyful phrase heard on Siegfried's first entry, we hear in quick succession quotations from all the previous material as Siegfried works

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the bellows and goes through all the processes of forging the blade. The richness of sound culminates in the song of the Forge, punctuated by imitative effects of hammering and filing, and even of the hissing of the water as the blade is plunged into the trough for tempering. And all the while there is the cunning by-play to watch as the dwarf pretends to prepare food, with the intention of introducing poison into the mess, so that he may gain the gold for himself when the boy shall have slain the dragon. Mime's malice and Siegfried's ardour are contrasted with superb effect ; and after the Sword has been forged and tested with the result of the cleavage of the anvil, the act closes with an exultant shout of joy as Siegfried triumphs in the possession of the sword Nothung.

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THE SECOND ACT.

In front of the entrance to the hole where the dragon Fafner sleeps over his useless hoard, we see, through the deep gloom which shrouds the scene, the Nibelung, Alberich. As the wind sweeps a cloud away and allows a moonbeam to pierce the darkness, another figure, that of Wotan, becomes visible ; and the gnome, in anger, accuses the god of desiring to help Siegfried in the coming combat. But Wotan has no intention of again attempting to aid the hero of his creation. He even warns Alberich of Mime's plan for gaining the Ring, and proposes to waken the dragon so as to tell him of his danger, and to offer him protection in exchange for the coveted Treasure. Growling from out of the depths of his den, Fafner declines the

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proffered exchange; and Wotan departs.

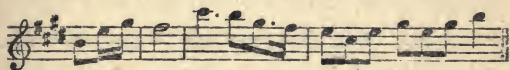
Armed with the sword, Siegfried arrives, accompanied by Mime. The dwarf, as he points out the dragon's cave, conjures up a horrible picture of the noisome beast, in the music of which passage some of the leaping chromatics of Loge and the roar of Fafner are brought in. Siegfried's lack of fear is indicated, amongst other phrases, by the motive of the *Volsung* race.

When Mime withdraws to conceal himself, Siegfried is left alone with Nature in the forest; and soon the ear is entranced by the exquisitely idyllic music, which continues until the attention is called to the note of one bird in particular. One of these phrases is practically the same as *Brünnhilde's* *sleep*, which itself is obviously derived

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from the *Rhine-maidens*. Siegfried tries to imitate the bird's note by means

THE VOICE OF THE BIRD.



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draws forth the sword, his hand becomes scorched by the fierce heat of the dragon's blood, which, as he puts his hand to his mouth, he tastes. In an instant the voice of the bird becomes intelligible to him, and he stands amazed. He learns by this means of the precious Treasure, of the Ring and the magic Cap which are concealed in the cave, and disappears in search of them.

Alberich and Mime now meet, and quarrel bitterly as to the ownership of the Treasure now that the dragon has been slain. In rage they withdraw, as Siegfried returns with both Cap and Ring in his possession. The vehement bickering of the dwarfs gives way once more to the placid beauty of the forest idyll as the bird reveals to Siegfried Mime's treacherous designs. Hence when the dwarf comes back with fawn-

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ing caresses and offers him refreshment, Siegfried realises the depth of his guilty schemes and kills him. As he sits awhile at the foot of the tree to rest, the bird proceeds to tell him of a lovely maiden who sleeps upon a rock, awaiting a hero who shall brave the girdle of fire that surrounds her. With a joyous shout and with renewed vigour Siegfried bids the bird lead him to Brünnhilde.

Since the combat with the dragon, the music is a masterly weaving together of material now perfectly familiar, which is continued until, later on, the bird's warbling becomes increasingly prominent. Fafner's death, to the accompaniment of a stroke on the drum, and the death of Mime to that of a harsh succession of thirds, into which the hateful glee of Alberich is introduced, are special effects that will hardly escape notice.

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THE THIRD ACT.

In the prelude, the predominance of the *Ride*, merging gradually into *Destiny* and the *Wanderer*, prepares us for another scene with Wotan.

It will be remembered that in the case of this act Wagner took up the writing of the music after a long interval. It is surprising to find no break in the continuity of the music ; but the fact becomes less curious when we remember the plan on which Wagner was working. The opening scene with Wotan, so far as the story is concerned, is in the nature of a recapitulation—a statement of the position of affairs at the moment.

As the curtain rises, we see the god in a wild and lonely place at the base of the rocks on whose summit Brünnhilde reposes. He has come to break in upon

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but his further progress to Brünnhilde is barred by Wotan. Wonderful is the running commentary of the music as the hero tells of his journey. We hear the *Bird* who has guided him, and *Fafner* by whose death the magic gifts have come into his possession ; the *Forge* reminds us of his up-bringing by the dwarf, and the *Volsung Race* recalls his origin.

At Wotan's questionings Siegfried becomes impatient. Stung by the youth's taunts, Wotan, who is wavering with regard to his resignation, endeavours to inspire him with fear by threatening the power of the flames. As Wotan raises his spear, Siegfried rushes at him and shatters it with his sword. The flames swell up as the vanquished god disappears ; and with a joyful cry, Siegfried plunges through the wall of fire and sounds a greeting on his horn.

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As the scene changes, the characteristic motives, gradually merging into *Brünnhilde's Sleep*, form an impressive interlude by which Siegfried's journey to the summit of the rocks is indicated. As the open space and the fir-tree, which we saw in the last act of *Die Walküre*, become visible, the *Freya* motive, announced in wonderful fashion by the violins, takes the lead; and Siegfried finds the object of his quest. *Love's Fascination* (used once in *Das Rheingold*) is soon followed by the special themes with which we left the intrepid daughter of Wotan, and *Wotan's Farewell* is repeated. Singularly beautiful are the interweavings of other motives, principally those of *Freya* and *Fate*.

After the first amazement at his discovery, Siegfried loosens the sleeper's

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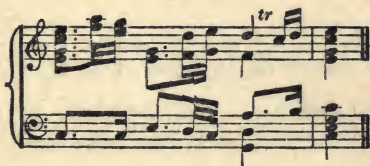
helmet and is yet more astonished at the long tresses which fall therefrom. Severing the thongs from the breastplate with his sword, he discovers the form of a woman, which awakens a memory of his mother. Other emotions soon crowd into his heart, and he questions himself as to whether it be fear he now experiences. At Siegfried's kiss, Brünnhilde opens her eyes.

Then begins a love-duet such as Wagner alone could write, and the enjoyment of its power and beauty, its emotional force and irresistible flow, is not lessened when we recognise how much nearer the opera form Wagner is now tending. To Siegfried's impetuous delight there is contrasted Brünnhilde's regret, as the thought of her lost divinity and power comes back to her. But even as she regards the token of these losses

Des Nibelungen

(the discarded armour), a new love, that of a living woman, springs up in her heart and she cannot withstand its sway. In ecstasy, she gives herself to the hero who has won her.

From Brünnhilde's first awakening, as she hails the world again after her long sleep, to the enthusiastic love motive which, after its first use, is re-



introduced for the climax of this magnificent ending, the frequent use of preceding themes, such as *Wotan's Anger*, the *Curse of the Ring* and *the Ride* will be easily followed. *The Guardian of the Sword* is heard when Siegfried's rapture is at its height ; and the three main themes,

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with the *Sleep* motive, will be recognised as the material out of which, on the basis of an old German lullaby, Wagner formed the symphonic poem known as the Siegfried Idyll.



Thus in a strenuous outburst of triumphant melody this exhilarating

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section of the great drama comes to an end ; but it is of interest to call attention briefly to the similarity between this central incident of Brünnhilde's awakening to the old myth of the Earth's awakening under the power of the Sun, which has come down to us in its most familiar form in the homely tale of the "Sleeping Beauty." In the Thidrek-saga, of which mention has been made as the source to which Wagner mainly turned for this portion of the work, Brünnhilde dwells in a castle, and Siegfried bursts open the doors to gain her. In other folk-tales, she is represented as dwelling upon a mountain of glass, up the sides of which none but Sigurd (Siegfried's counterpart) can climb or ride. And this version of the story leads to the generally accepted conclusion that the incident is typical of

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a hero's visit to the Underworld,—the place of departed spirits. Thus from the fascination of the study of the music we are led by Wagner's immortal work to dip at least into the equally absorbing study of Folk-lore.

GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG.

Many are the points of interest in this concluding section, which should be more than briefly touched upon in this setting forth of the story and Music of the Ring. In writing the Death of Siegfried, the germ from which the completed cycle of dramas sprang, Wagner reversed the usual order of procedure and began at the end. In this "Dusk of the gods" we have the original story as planned by him, and in fitting it on to the preceding sections it was necessary to have a recapitulation. Thus the first scene with the Norns is another prologue.

As indicated in the last part of Siegfried, when Wagner took up his interrupted labours, the music of *Götterdämmerung* is even more completely cast in the operatic mould ; but

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the treatment of the constructional themes, and the free melodic writing is so grand and picturesque that its force is still very far from being restrained by any conventional limits. The overwhelming disaster which overtakes the gods, and the overthrow of their power, to which we have been led in expectation, comes with such intensity that the spectacular effect of the ending, with its mighty conflagration and its surging flood, is discounted.

After Brünnhilde's awakening it cannot be denied that the last stages in Siegfried's career lose power and some of their impressiveness by being crowded together within the limits of a practical presentation. The hero, in fact, suffers the same disadvantage as Seigmund, his father, did by the necessary shortening of the story. In

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comparison with the Volsunga-saga and the Nibelunglied, Wagner's drama falls below the supreme dignity of the account and the circumstances of Siegfried's death. Again, in judging his treatment of the character of Brünnhilde in this final section—and it will be seen and felt that she loses, in a great measure, her claim on our sympathy, it must be remembered that the relations between her and Siegfried have become obscured in the various tales by which the legend has been handed down. Wagner seems at least to give the correct version of the story in regarding Brünnhilde as not only betrothed to Siegfried, but actually wedded to him.

THE FIRST ACT.

In the opening scene we are introduced to the three Norns—the Fates of

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Northern mythology—whose names are Urd, Verdandi and Skuld (signifying the past, present and future), and who appear to have been in existence before the gods. As they spin the cord of destiny, they tell the story of Wotan's visit to the spring which waters the root of the World-ash, and how, in payment for a draught at the fountain of wisdom he gave up one of his eyes. The second sister takes up the narrative, and tells of the spear, which Wotan formed out of one of the branches of the tree, being shattered by the young hero. The youngest of the three, in her turn, speaks of the making of a colossal pyre around the abode of the gods ; and that when this shall take fire the end of the power by which they rule the world will come. As the cord snaps in consequence of Alberich's

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malediction, the sisters lose their power of seeing into the future, and sink into the earth to join the eternal sleep of Erda. As the day breaks, Siegfried and Brünnhilde appears, and with vows of faithfulness exchange gifts of the ring and the horse Grane. Brünnhilde, having taught Siegfried all her sacred lore, bids him go out into the world and seek fresh adventures. After embracing her he sets out on his journey, and the joyful sound of his horn is heard as he goes down the valley.

The greatly developed music of this prologue may be regarded as divided in two parts at the conclusion of the scene with the Norns. As before, when we have had a re-statement of the position of affairs, the motives are brought before us in explanatory fashion.

The action is carried on by the inter-

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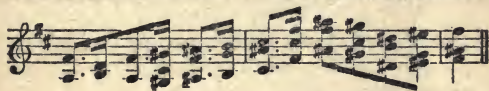
lude that is heard on the fall of the curtain. The flame-music tells of Siegfried's descent ; and the *Rhine maidens*, and the *Gold* indicates that he has reached the river. Then the note of what is to come is announced by the brass, in the *Gibichung* motive.

As the curtain rises on a castle interior, we are introduced to the new characters, Gunther and Gutrune, the last of the Gibichung race, and their evil counsellor, Hagen, partly a Nibelung. In the case of the two former personages, the introduction of historical details into the legend has caused obscurity. The father of the royal house of Gibich (connected, apparently, with Giuki, one of the names of Odin, in the Volsunga-saga), the mother and some younger brothers have disappeared from the story ; and in the Thidrek-saga, these

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kings of the Burgundian Rhine district, are also Nibelungs. In the original story Kriemhild (the Guttrune of Wagner's drama) is a more important character than Brünnhilde. Indeed, it would have been a decided gain if Wagner had made her a more formidable rival in Siegfried's love; but, interesting as these comparisons are, we must deal with the ending as Wagner planned it.

THE GIBICHUNGS.



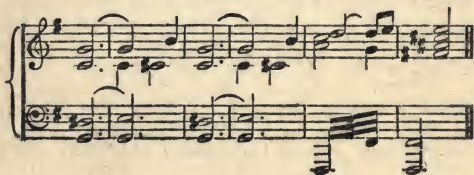
By the pompous Gibichung motive the character of the race, greedy and domineering, is clearly indicated. It is, in fact, similar to the attributes of the Nibelungs. The cunning Hagen now

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tells Gunther that there still remains something which he has not yet secured.

The pride and strength of the race is in danger of being lost, seeing that the two remaining representatives have neither of them a mate. So these two are told of Siegfried and Brünnhilde as husband for one and wife for the other ; and Hagen reminds Gunther that he can prepare a magic potion, by taking of which Siegfried will forget about Brünnhilde and fall in love with Gutrune. Weird and mysterious, the motive of *Forgetfulness*, joined on to that of the *Tarnhelm* is given out by the horns.

FORGETFULNESS.



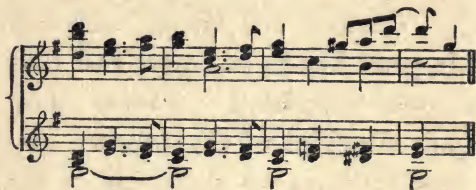
Des Nibelungen

By Seigfried's call we know the hero is crossing the river and approaching the castle. Gunther and Hagen, with fair words, greet him as he enters and offer him their friendship. Hagen now reminds Siegfried of the treasure, and the hero produces the magic cap as the only portion of it which he took away with him ; but he tells them of the ring which now graces the finger of the fairest of women.

Gutrune re-enters and offers him a draught from a drinking horn. With Brünnhilde's name on his lips, Siegfried takes it and the potion does its work. Gradually the melody of Brünnhilde's first greeting glides into *Wotan's bequest* ; and upon it, like a delicate embroidery, is placed *Brünnhilde's awakening*. Then the motive of *Forgetfulness* gives place to that of *Gutrune*. Siegfried gazes on

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GUTRUNE.



her in rapture as she slowly retires. He asks Gunther if he has a wife, and learns without the least surprise, that it is Brünnhilde whom the latter desires to win. Siegfried cheerfully assents to overcome the danger of fire and bring Brünnhilde in exchange for Guttrune. In delight, Gunther proposes an interchange of faithful vows. With sinister import the *Curse* is quoted, as both are unconsciously falling in with Hagen's wicked designs to obtain possession of the ring. Guttrune watches the two set forth on the journey; and retiring

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again, Hagen is left gloating over the situation. In the music, *Alberich's revenge* indicates the final triumph of evil.

In the next scene we have another interruption to the story in a scene between Brünnhilde and Waltraute, one of her Valkyrie sisters. Brünnhilde's first thoughts are that Wotan has pardoned her ; and she reflects on the joy that has come to her out of her pain. But Waltraute has only sad tidings to bring. As in the scene with the Norns, we hear of the pyre which Wotan has built around the palace, and of the gloomy resignation with which he awaits the end. Once he has announced that if the accursed Ring were restored to the Rhine, the gods and the world would be saved ; and it is for this reason that Waltraute has

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come to her sister. But she has to depart in despair, for Brünnhilde utterly refuses to give up the pledge which Siegfried, her hero and her loved one, has given her. Rather let Walhalla perish.

Brünnhilde starts up in joyful anticipation as she hears Siegfried's horn. But she is terrified to see him appear in the shape of another, Gunther. Brünnhilde thinks that Wotan has devised this calamity as another punishment. With brutal force Siegfried snatches off the ring, places it on his finger, and declaring her henceforth the bride of Gunther. This scene, intensely painful, is emphasised in a masterly fashion by the association of the *Gunther* theme with the voice of Siegfried. Underneath the music there is the *Nibelung* motive, and quotations of the

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Siegfried themes come in with a pathetic force. There is a strenuous motive indicative of loyalty to his new friend as Siegfried unsheaths his sword, but the *Power of the Helm* will be recognised as the leading musical idea in this telling scene.

THE SECOND ACT.

The second act, after a prelude in which the *Nibelung's triumph* and the *Ring* are predominant, opens with a scene between Hagen and his father Alberich. We are by the banks of the Rhine, and the Gibichung's castle, just visible through the darkness, is in the background. Hagen is in a species of trance, and Alberich's evil promptings weave themselves into his dream. He promises to gain the ring.

As day breaks, Siegfried arrives and

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joyfully announces to Guttrune that he has obtained Brünnhilde for her brother. Hagen calls together the vassals and bids them prepare for the arrival of the master and his bride, and orders sacrifices to be offered on the altar stones, which are set up by the river bank. A boat brings Gunther and Brünnhilde, and the unhappy woman gazes in amazement at Siegfried, into whose remembrance not a thought of recognition comes. Then as she catches sight of the ring, her fury finds vent in accusation : and Hagen, quick to begin his plan of vengeance, prompts her to take action against her treacherous betrayer. She repulses the sympathetic advances of Gunther, and declares that Siegfried is the one to whom she is indissolubly bound.

But Siegfried is merely concerned

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with proving his loyalty to his friend, and swears on his sword that he has not violated Gunther's bride. In agony at her abandonment, Brünnhilde turns to Hagen, and gives away the secret that Siegfried's back is not invulnerable. But Gunther is appalled at the thought of murdering the man whom he is pledged in friendship. He even thinks of his sister's grief, and the mention of this other woman's name goads Brünnhilde into frenzy. Gunther is brought to acquiesce in the murder. The hunt which is fixed for the morrow shall furnish the pretext. It shall be given out that a boar has killed Siegfried. The bridal procession with Siegfried and Gutrune now enters, and Gunther, taking Brünnhilde's unwilling hand, joins the train. The theme of *Gutrune's Welcome* is modified into the

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marriage call, but Hagen's evil purpose is heard as the curtain falls.

THE THIRD ACT.

Siegfried, in the chase, has strayed from his companions. We are by the banks of the river again, as the predominance of the *Rhine Maidens* in the prologue has led us to expect.

The three maidens try to induce Siegfried to give up the ring, but their warnings are unheeded. As the others assemble, the motive of the Curse is heard weaving itself into the sound of the huntsmen's horns. Siegfried laughingly tells them of the croakings of the Rhine Maidens, at which Gunther's attention is arrested. To Hagen's question as to his knowledge of the language of the birds, Siegfried relates the

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story of his youth. During its recital, Hagen has prepared an antidote to the potion under the spell of which Siegfried is bound, and now offers it to the hero. Then, to a running accompaniment of the themes in the music, as memory returns to him, Siegfried relates the finding of Brünnhilde. His attention is distracted for an instant by the flight of two ravens, and then Hagen, seizing his opportunity, plunges his spear into Siegfried's back. With an effort, Siegfried raises his shield to crush his assassin, but he falls upon it as his strength ebbs. Dying, he recalls the supreme moment when his kiss awakened Brünnhilde.

The special motives are here employed by Wagner in their fullest development, and a striking effect is obtained by the use of *Siegfried's call*, which is never

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finished, but breaks off like the last breath of a dying man. To the motive of *Brünnhilde's* love, and with her name on his lips, he dies. Magnificently eloquent is the remaining portion of the music known as Siegfried's funeral march. It is more properly an oration. The life and sorrows of this scion of the Volsung race are vividly pictured. As the vassals bear Siegfried away, mists and darkness fill the scene; and the scene changes to the interior of the Gibichung's palace, with the river in the background.

As the corpse is brought in, Guttrune, who has had a presentiment of the tragedy, questions Gunther; and she then learns of Hagen's foul deed. But Hagen, far from being appalled at the accusation, comes forward to claim the ring as his reward. Gunther, in

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defending it as the heritage of Gutrune, is slain by Hagen, who then approaches the corpse to take it by force. But the dead man's hand raises itself in warning, and in horror Hagen steps back.

The end of the scene is filled with the dignity of Brünnhilde's sorrow. She repulses the weeping Gutrune, and reminds her that she is the one to whom Siegfried gave his heart. She orders the vassals to prepare a pyre to burn the body, and sends for her horse, Grane. To the assembled people she bequeaths her knowledge which she has gained at the price of such terrible suffering. No gold, nor power, but Love, all powerful, and in comparison with which the Gods are as nothing, is the ruler of the Universe. Removing the bridle from the horse, she springs on his back, and together they leap into

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the flames. As the pyre burns down in dense smoke, the Rhine is seen to be overflowing its banks ; and on the surging flood are borne the Rhine-maidens. With a last effort Hagen throws himself into the waters in the hope of yet securing the Ring, which Brünnhilde placed on her finger before she leapt into the flames. But one of the Rhine-maidens has secured it, and the other two drag Hagen down into the watery grave. Then the scene is filled with the lurid light of the burning Walhalla as, in a seething furnace, the Gods are annihilated.

But this splendidly emotional ending in which the majesty of Brünnhilde's grief is supreme, is as nothing to the musical narration. Operatic as this final section of *The Ring* may be, it is music such as no other brain but

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Wagner's could have conceived. From the *Walballa* motive, given to the tubas, the *Rhine-maidens* leads on to the *Redemption by Love*, an air which was sung, it will be remembered, by Sieglinde in the first part of the Trilogy. And if we are inclined to question the strength or appropriateness of this particular melody, its treatment is certainly triumphant, and in all Wagner's glorious colour and fulness in his orchestration there is nothing to excel this prodigious musical ending to a huge drama such as he alone could have brought to a successful end.

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